

House Speaker Marco Rubio's
Remarks to the Opening Day Session
Florida House of Representatives
Tuesday, March 6, 2007

As we gather today, the first day of this legislative session, we begin where Florida has seemed to be every day for the better part of the last decade, at the forefront of all the major issues of our time.

We are faced with challenges that must be confronted and resolved.

In the long term, we can not regulate nor legislate our way to more stable and affordable property insurance. The only way to bring lower rates is to make hurricanes less expensive. So we must invest in the science and the practice of mitigation.

Runaway property taxes threaten the standard of living of million of homeowners and renters and the bottom of lines of business' big and small. We must pass meaningful, comprehensive and immediate property tax relief this session.

Along with our challenges, we are also met with extraordinary opportunities.

The opportunity to design a world class system of education available to all our children, regardless of where they start out in life. To accomplish this will require us to do three things:

First, we should do away with the sunshine state standards and in its place create a new public school curriculum comparable to those of the leading education systems in the world.

Second, we should make it the central mission statement of our public schools to insure all of our children graduate high school and be either headed to college or nationally certified in some trade or career.

Third, we must recognize that while we must hold all our children to the same high standards, some kids will need more help than others to meet those standards.

If a child is being raised in an unstable home, they have one strike against them. If they also live in a dangerous neighborhood that is two strikes against them. And if they have no access to health care that child has three strikes against them. That child will arrive at the first day in school already behind. It doesn't matter how good the curriculum may be. It won't matter how small the class size. It won't matter how much you pay that teacher. A child with three strikes against them is going to struggle to learn and progress unless you address those three strikes.

And addressing those three strikes is not an option, it is a obligation. You see, the nations we compete against. They do not even try to teach kids in those circumstances. But the fact that we will, sets us apart from the rest of the world. It is one of the things that makes America special. Without this commitment, we are nothing more than another rich nation with a big army.

And so the opportunity before is to do something no nation and no people have ever done before. To create a world class system of education and preparation available to all our people, irrespective of where you start out in life.

Another opportunity before us is to serve as an international model for energy efficiency and independence. On the issue of energy, Global warming, dependence on foreign energy sources and capitalism have come together to create opportunities no one could have envisioned just a few short years ago.

Today, Florida has the opportunity to pursue bold energy policies, not just because they are good for the environment, but because you can actually make money at it. The nation and ultimately the whole world is headed towards emission caps and energy diversification. Those changes will require technological advances that make such measures cost effective. The demand towards such advances will create an industry to meet it. Florida should be the silicon valley of that emerging industry.

Throughout the last few months we have all heard the calls for bipartisanship.

But bipartisanship is one of the most abused and most misunderstood terms in all of politics.

It doesn't mean getting along for the sake of getting along.

It doesn't mean abandoning your principles so that you fit in with the majority.

True legislative bipartisanship, the kind envisioned by those who designed this system of government, the kind our people deserve, is one where both parties share a common vision of the future, and spend all their time and energy debating how to bring that vision into reality.

That is what I hope the culture of the Florida House will be. A place where both parties agree on where they want to go, and they spend all their time and energy debating on which would be the best way to get there.

Let us agree here today to adopt among ourselves a simple and unwritten rule.

We will not rise to criticize someone else's idea unless we are prepared to offer an alternative idea of our own.

That alternative idea can be a new idea. It can be a way to improve the idea that has been offered. Or it can simply be a defense of the status quo.

For too long politics has been about scoring political points rather than solving problems. By adopting and adhering to this one simple rule, our work here will become about problem solving.

On the most important challenge facing our state, property taxes, that is exactly how I hope it will work.

I congratulate the members of the majority party, and in particular Speaker-Designate Ray Sansom, for proposing the boldest and most sweeping tax initiative in Florida's history.

And I congratulate the members of the minority party for responding, not with a press release, but with a plan of their own.

On property taxes Republicans and Democrats share a common vision. We all agree that property taxes are too high. Now let us spend the next 60 days debating on what is the best way to bring them down.

And if we do, not only can we solve the property tax crisis. We will help usher in a new political culture that will be the envy of the nation.

CONCLUSION

Recent events remind us that our time on this earth is limited, and our time in this process even more so.

For a brief period of time, you and I are entrusted with the extraordinary power to impact the real lives of real people. Here we will solve with laws and dollars, problems that too many people around the world still must solve with violence and civil war.

Today marks the beginning of my eighth regular session. As I look back at the seven before I clearly recall that our best days were those spent on bold policy and big ideas. And our worst days where those we spent focused on just about anything else.

To tackle the big and relevant issues of the day with bold and innovative ideas is without question the most rewarding way to serve.

What will it take to confront and solve the big problems of our time?

What will it take to fully capitalize on the opportunities before us?

It will take what it has always taken, leadership.

We live in a society obsessed with public opinion. But leadership has never been about popularity.

Leadership can not be measured in a poll or even in the result of an election.

It can only be truly seen with the benefit of time. From the perspective of 20 years, not 20 days.

If we are to truly lead then we must allow history, not tomorrows newspapers to be the ultimate judge of our work.

We must aspire always to be on the right side, even if it is not the winning side.

Do not be afraid to offer ideas that draw opposition. Remember, if no one is against your idea, then your idea probably doesn't do anything.

As I close let me share one more observation. Over the years I have noticed that this process is made up two kinds of people.

Those who came here to be somebody. And those who came here to do something.

Ironically, only the ones who came here to do something, ever became someone!

So as we begin our work, lets us aspire to confront and solve the big problems of our time.

Lets us endeavor to seize upon the unique opportunities before our state.

Let us establish a culture of ideas. A place where everyone agrees on what we need to do and then spend all their time and energy debating on what is the best way to do it.

Above all else, let us lead.